

no doubt there will be Katrina supplementals 2 and 3 to follow.

We should do this, but we should also do more by encouraging Americans and corporate citizens to open their hearts and their wallets, and with this outpouring of support we will speed the recovery.

Mr. Speaker, for the last 2 weeks I have been on active duty as a reservist in the United States Navy. Working as an intelligence officer in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I spent the first week on duty reporting on the usual topics: Developments in Afghanistan, the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza, et cetera, but all of that changed when Katrina loomed off the coast of the United States. Deep in the operations center of the Joint Staff, we formed a Katrina response cell to coordinate what is now becoming the largest U.S. military-civilian relief effort in history. We focused all of the vast resources of the Department of Defense on the defense of New Orleans. Within hours of the response cell's creation, dozens of ships, hundreds of planes, thousands of troops and millions of meals were on the way.

Like the U.S. military's response to the tsunami, the current operation will save lives, repair infrastructure, and will speed the recovery. I want to particularly thank our new Chief of Naval Operations who took it on his own initiative to send ships towards the relief effort. Admiral Mullen's prompt action meant that the Navy relief helicopters arrived on the scene much sooner than planned.

Today in the wake of this natural disaster, we are witnessing selfless dedication by Americans in uniform. There are over 21,000 military personnel responding to the hurricane. The bulk of these forces are National Guard men and women called into service to assist in the rescue effort. They are truly citizen soldiers and their service is urgently needed and deeply appreciated.

As more National Guard troops arrive on the scene, law and in order will be restored and communications and power reestablished. Today there are more than 154 helicopters rescuing trapped civilians, delivering food and water, and dropping sand bags to plug the breaches in the levee system. The Army Corps of Engineers is working to plug gaps in the levees and to begin pumping the water out of New Orleans.

More help is on the way. The crew of the USS *Bataan* is on station off the coast with its helicopters delivering supplies and conducting search and rescue missions. USS *Iwo Jima* and the mighty aircraft carrier USS *Harry Truman* are also there to provide helicopter support. All told, there are over 10 Navy ships currently on station or on their way to provide support, and this includes the hospital ship USS *Comfort* with 2,000 hospital beds.

The DLA has made more than 750,000 Meals-Ready-to-Eat available, and has access to 3 million more if needed. The

response from the Department of Defense has been impressive and is accelerating, and I want to thank Admiral Keating at Northern Command, Lieutenant General Honore of Joint Task Force Katrina, and Lieutenant General Blum at the National Guard Bureau for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, there are countless acts of heroism taking place along the Gulf Coast. The military, Coast Guard and the FEMA are all spearheading this Federal response. Every day people are doing their part for the relief effort and we here in Congress should do that as well by directing additional resources to the effort.

Mr. Speaker, today is just a first step in what is going to be a long and costly recovery, and we should stand united by our commitment to help rebuild those hurt by Katrina.

HURRICANE KATRINA SUPPLEMENTAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my personal condolences, that of my family and all of the constituents I am privileged to represent, to the families and victims of this terrible natural disaster. I almost did not come down here today because I am painfully aware that nothing we can say here is going to make the kind of difference that we would like to make.

The \$10.5 billion will make some difference, but it is very small in comparison to the magnitude of the suffering. What I think myself and all of my colleagues would rather be doing is being down there in New Orleans helping with the effort. We would like to be giving water to those thirsty, comfort to those who have lost loved ones, and help begin the rebuilding progress with our own hands.

We are not able to be there because we are not needed as much as the rescue personnel. While we would like to be there, we have constituents calling and asking tough questions, and I think it is incumbent upon us to respond to some of those tough questions.

Constituents are asking: Why was the preparation not better? Why is it taking so long to rescue people and provide basic food and shelter and clothing? Why are oil companies who are already enjoying record profits being able to take what seems to be exorbitant profit from even this catastrophe?

I do not have the answer to all of those, but some things we should consider and the American people have a right to know, the American people have a right to know that for the past 5 years the administration has proposed draconian cuts to the Corps of Engineers' budgets, including nearly a 50 percent cut to hurricane flood prevention in the very area now affected by this tragedy.

It would be fair to call it a natural disaster, but in this case this natural disaster was aided and abetted by budget cuts that inhibited the ability of the Corps of Engineers to prevent the devastating damage that we have seen, and I think the American people have a right to know that.

Government in the end is about choices, and choices have consequences. If we choose tax cuts in the short term for some of the wealthiest Americans, and in exchange for those tax cuts we cut the budget for the Corps of Engineers for flood control, for harbor maintenance and for all of the other things that the Corps does, we see the consequences.

I serve on the Water Resources Subcommittee, and we have oversight over the Corps, and when the administration has come with these proposed cuts they have been supported by groups like Taxpayers for Common Sense. And I and some of my colleagues have asked, help us understand something. If we spend a few dollars today to save hundreds or thousands of dollars and countless lives tomorrow, how is it common sense to not spend those dollars?

It may look in the short term more politically appealing that we have cut the terrible Corps of Engineers and we have saved pork spending, but if in the long run what you have done is failed to maintain your levees, failed to provide flood control prevention, failed to prepare for precisely this disaster, you have been beyond penny wise and pound foolish, you have been irresponsible. And I regret to say that I believe the policies of this administration with regard to Corps of Engineers projects have been precisely that. And tragically, the people of New Orleans are suffering the consequences.

We have made other choices. We have chosen to send the National Guard and military and American dollars and other resources overseas to Iraq, and now we are stretched in our economy's ability to fund this relief effort. We will do so because we must and should do so, but the \$300 billion spent in Iraq could be certainly better used by the people in the southeast.

We have chosen to allow energy companies to raise their prices without any constraint at all, and now consumers who used to be paying \$20 to \$30 to fill their tanks are paying \$80 to \$90 and this will have a devastating effect on our economy.

In closing, I want to commend the citizens in the region affected who are pulling together in spite of what they see as a lack of government support to help one another in a time of need, and I want to commend the people of my own district and districts around the country who are digging deep in their wallets and resources.

I know school groups are gathering clothing and having fund-raising drives. These young people deserve to be commended, and I urge all Americans to pitch in and do whatever we can to help the victims of this tragedy.